

Press Release

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Four Air Force Personnel Win Outstanding Contributions Awards from AbilityOne Program

Arlington, VA—Four Air Force personnel have been selected to receive Outstanding Contributions Awards by the Committee for Purchase From People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled. The Outstanding Contributions Award recognizes Federal employees for their efforts in creating employment opportunities on Federal contracts for people who are blind or have other severe disabilities under the AbilityOne (formerly Javits-Wagner-O'Day or JWOD) Program.

“Ms. Edens, Lt. Col. Westermeyer, Mr. Elliot, and Ms. Strand are strong proponents of the AbilityOne Program and most deserving of this award. Through their efforts, they have been able to create stable, meaningful employment for individuals who are blind or severely disabled,” said Andrew D. Houghton, Committee Chairperson.

Ms. Arvetta Edens is a Contract Specialist at Little Rock Air Force Base. For 14 years Ms. Edens has developed and enhanced the AbilityOne Program for the Arkansas Army National Guard and Little Rock Air Force Base. She is the contract administrator on grounds maintenance and food services AbilityOne contracts and has periodically stepped in as administrator for the AbilityOne custodial contract. In 1993-2001, she steered procurement of administrative supply items to vendors supporting the AbilityOne Program, and increased AbilityOne office supply purchases from 20% to 75%. In 2001, she was instrumental in converting base grounds maintenance service contracts to the first AbilityOne grounds contract. Her exceptional work has provided employment to more than 145 people with severe disabilities and enabled the AbilityOne Program to provide the Federal Government with \$3.5M annually.

Lt. Col. Roger Westermeyer is the Commander, 55th Contracting Squadron, at Offutt Air Force Base. Lt. Col. Westermeyer's association with the AbilityOne Program began in 2000 at Fairchild Air Force Base in Washington. He was instrumental in the 256% growth of Fulltime Equivalent Employees for custodial and grounds maintenance contracts at Fairchild and 17% growth at Offutt AFB, with the administrative services and custodial contracts. He originated the AbilityOne Appreciation Picnic at Fairchild and Offutt, honoring AbilityOne workers and increasing awareness of the capabilities of people with severe disabilities. He consistently looks for opportunities on base to further the AbilityOne Program by revisiting small businesses and training personnel; and he encourages his staff to look to AbilityOne first.

Mr. John Elliott is a Supervisory Contract Specialist at Scott Air Force Base. For 7 years John Elliott has managed four AbilityOne contracts that enable the AbilityOne Program to provide the Air Force with \$40M in services. These contracts provide mission-critical operational support to Scott AFB and its 375th Airlift Wing. Contracts include grounds maintenance, food service,

custodial services and the operations of the Scott Recycling Center. Impressively, Mr. Elliott's work on the custodial contract resulted in employment for 40 people with severe disabilities who clean 1.5M square feet of office space per day, in 100 buildings. Mr. Elliott's dining facility contract is routinely recognized as one of the best AF dining facilities. In FY05, Mr. Elliott's contracts provided employment opportunities for 169 people with severe disabilities. Furthermore, last year 63 workers graduated from the rehabilitation program and 20 were placed into competitive employment.

Ms. Leslie Strand is a Lead Contract Specialist/Contracting Officer at Elmendorf Air Force Base. Ms. Strand has been an unwavering AbilityOne supporter for 18 years. She oversees AbilityOne contracts that provide the Federal Government with \$18M annually and employ 100 people who are blind or severely disabled. These contracts positively impact 10,000 government personnel and their dependents daily. The Elmendorf dining facility is one example of this positive impact. AbilityOne employees, contingency cooks who backfill essential military personnel positions due to deployment, serve 40,000 meals a month and operate at peak efficiency 24/7. On a different contract, Ms. Strand teamed with AbilityOne to introduce workforce efficiencies in mail sorting by re-arranging workspace layout, contributing to a reduction of operational expenses by 31%. Moreover, she understands accessibility needs for people with disabilities and has helped to resolved snow/ice related issues for workers. Furthermore, she co-sponsored Disability Awareness Training for government personnel throughout the Elmendorf AFB and Ft. Richardson communities.

The Outstanding Contributions Awards were presented to Ms. Edens and Lt. Col. Westermeyer at the NISH 2007 National Training and Achievement Conference held April 29-May 1, 2007, in Grapevine, Texas. Mr. Elliott and Ms. Strand received their awards at separate ceremonies.

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The Committee for Purchase From People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled is an independent Federal agency that administers the AbilityOne (formerly Javits-Wagner-O'Day or JWOD) Program, which creates employment opportunities for persons who are blind or have other severe disabilities. The Committee's primary means of achieving its employment goal is through orchestrating Government purchases of supplies and services from nonprofit agencies employing such individuals.

NISH, which serves people with a range of disabilities, is one of the two national, nonprofit organizations designated by the Committee to assist in the implementation of the AbilityOne Program. Together with National Industries for the Blind, these two agencies assist over 600 community-based nonprofit agencies participate in the AbilityOne Program.